Research Memo:
The Development of Mobilization as a Concept through the Social Movement Literature

prepared for “Mobilized Contention: The State-Protest Movement Nexus”

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September 17-18th, 2015
Overview

This memo traces and comments on the development of mobilization as a concept over the four major social movement paradigms — mass society, resource mobilization, political process, and contentious politics. The memo focus chiefly on the concept of mobilization as it has been articulated and developed by the self-declared leaderships these schools.¹

The genealogy begins with mass society theory: if mobilization represents a change in state — from the withholding of resources to the commitment of resources — then mass society theory was all about mobilization, here the change in state from a stable one to an unstable one of social unrest. The concept of mobilization then skipped a generation — ironically, that generation is the resource mobilization theorists. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald’s quasi-economic model folded ‘mobilizing action’ into its static actors and their preferences, so that what varied was not what actors chose to do, but rather what kinds of actors a particular social movement organization possessed.²

Political process theory (PPT) re-introduced mobilization as a form of agency by conceptualizing ‘organizing structures’ on one hand, and how those structures are understood by those that enact them on the other, as distinct concepts. Organizing structures accounted for resources (carrying over from the resource mobilization theorists) while, critically, cultural frames made the commitment of those resources a probabilistic function of how structures are understood — not a deterministic function of whether an actor was a ‘constituent’ or an ‘adherent.’ Finally and most recently, contentious politics theory took each static component of the political process framework, replaced it with a dynamic variant, and broadened it so that according to its authors, “mobilization” now described the entire process of the episode of contention. However, I suggest that the contentious politics theorists went too far — that they denatured the concept past utility, so that it was no longer possible to distinguish mobilization from political action more broadly.³

In this way, the development of the field, and of the concept of mobilization within it, followed an arc, with the political process and contentious politics schools walking back much of the overcorrection committed by resource deprivation theory, such that these modern schools can be read crudely as updates on mass society theory, with more careful specification of concepts and

¹ I adopt this format for two reasons: first, to establish the conventional understanding of each school and its treatment of mobilization as a baseline before deviating with more unconventional takes — i.e., to crawl before walking. Second, this is an extremely self-aware literature, with each major school of thought possessing a clear leadership that explicitly self-identifies and self-defines — i.e. Neil Smelser, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, Doug McAdam John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, and Doug McAdam Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly (Jasper and Goodwin, discussing ‘political opportunity’ and ‘political process’ approaches, refer to “the prolific efforts of senior scholars” towards the establishment of PPT as “the hegemonic paradigm” among social movement analysts [Jasper and Goodwin, Rethinking Social Movements, 3]). As Tarrow notes and criticizes, some of this self-definition and self-proclamation has come in the context of paradigm warfare (Jasper and Goodwin, Rethinking Social Movements, 39-46).

² This does not mean the resource mobilization school is useless or irrelevant for understanding mobilization; on the contrary, like many economic or ideal-type rationalist models, it is extremely useful as a baseline from which to identify interesting deviations.

³ For this reason — the reason of maintaining a scope of inquiry that is useful — in the partner memo to this one, I borrow the political process framework for organizing an inquiry into state-supported social movements in contemporary Russia.
(empirically incorrect) psychological mechanisms switched out for (more well-validated) political ones.4

**Conceptualizing Mobilization**

One particular challenge for this exercise is worth noting: the challenge of disentangling mobilization as a distinct concept from the broader theories of collective action in which it functions. For example, while the political process model limits mobilization to a distinct stage, for the contentious politics school, “mobilization occurs throughout an episode of contention [emphasis mine].”5 So, there is a choice – whether to investigate mobilization strictly, where each author uses the term explicitly, or broadly, where mobilization bleeds into all aspects of contentious politics.

This memo cuts a middle ground by focusing on those pieces of each social movement theory that address mobilization explicitly, and only discussing other components of contentious politics where they have direct bearing on how mobilization itself is conceptualized. This requires settling on a ‘neutral ground’ definition of mobilization that carries over all four schools without violating the core notion of mobilization held by any one of them. I borrow the minimalist conceptualization of mobilization from Tilly’s 1978 work *From Mobilization to Revolution*, which is sufficiently abstract to generalize across social movements paradigms, but preserves the intuitive notion of mobilization as a process towards political action – as Tilly puts it, “the process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life.”6 Tilly represents this conceptualization as a useful formula:

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\text{Mobilization level} = \text{sum} \left( \text{market value of factor of production nominally under group control} \times \text{probability of delivery when called for} \right)
\]

Two important features of this representation will recur across the theories of social movements discussed here. First, the bifurcation between resources and delivery will map on neatly to the frameworks proposed by political process and contentious politics models. Second, whether a model accounts for the processual component of this conceptualization – the delivery of resources – will be an implicit point of contention between schools, and an important factor deciding whether a framework sufficiently theorizes mobilization.

**Mass Society: Mobilization Arrives**

Distilled to its basic elements, the core proposition of the mass society school matches its representation in later literature: during periods of structural crisis and under conditions of social atomization, psychologies move towards irrationality, rendering those individuals more likely to be “captured” by mobilizing forces seeking to extend social control. This core proposition has been shown to be empirically incorrect.7 Nevertheless, with a more fine-grained view that distinguishes

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4 As reflected here, this memo focuses chiefly on how authors have theorized and conceptualized mobilization – it leaves out the empirical side of this work. In other words, the chief purpose of this memo is to analyze how these authors have explained mobilization, regardless of whether those explanations have been empirically correct.

5 McAdam, *Political Process*, 51; McAdam et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 44-5.

6 Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 69; Or as Etzioni put it, “the process by which a unit gains significantly in the control of assets it previously did not control” (Etzioni, *The Active Society*, 388-9).

between strands of mass society theory, this literature can still be useful. In particular, it is helpful to recognize the mass society project as borrowing key concepts such as “the loss of insulation of non-elites” and “the rise of elites bent on total mobilization of the population” from the totalitarian school — in particular from Emil Lederer (1940) and Hannah Arendt (1951) — but for purposes of building a distinct theory to be assessed separately.8

Assessed separately, several aspects become useful.9 Mass society theory places mobilization squarely in the center of attention and explicitly theorizes it. It includes each major concept that would reappear twenty years later as the political process framework. Finally, it explicitly argues for dynamic processes, pre-dating McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s revisions of ‘static’ mechanisms by three decades.

*Conceptualizing mobilization*

The mass society literature is all about mobilization. Looking backward from contemporary literature, this should not necessarily be expected, since in subsequent social movement theories, mobilization features as one component amongst others. William Kornhauser puts mobilization immediately up front: a chief objective is “to show how variations in the character of the individual’s social relations influence his receptivity or resistance to the appeals of totalitarianism,” while Neil Smelser inserts mobilization directly into his definition of collective behavior: “we define collective behavior as mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action.”10 In fact, this move is even a problem for mass society: these theories tend towards treating mobilization in a vacuum, stripping away the structural variables that subsequent schools would introduce as basic revisions.

The mass society theorists conceptualize mobilization more explicitly and deliberately many later scholars. Mobilization features as one of Smelser’s five criteria for distinguishing collective from small-group behavior; he conceptualizes mobilization as a mass process amongst larger groups that respond to “incitation, agitation, gaining attention, the development of morale, the manipulation of discontent, the overcoming of apathy and resistance, the fashioning of group images, and the development of strategy gain precedence.”11 As this memo will show, more abstract definitions of mobilization are liable to denature, so that in some studies it becomes unclear what type of political activity is not mobilization — mass society theorists do not have this problem.

*How Mobilization Functions in the Theory*

Like resource deprivation theory, mass society is primarily a theory about the conditions under which mobilization is most likely to take place. Typically, this condition is atomization, “in which an aggregate of individuals are related to one another only by way of their relation to a common authority, especially the state.”12 “Mass society is objectively the atomized society, and subjectively the alienated population. Therefore, mass society is a system in which there is high availability of a population

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9 Of course, the chief critique of the mass society school still stands: these theories simply get wrong the mechanism and therefore the relationship between atomization and mobilization. However, getting this mechanism wrong should not spoil the utility of the rest of the framework.
11 Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, 6; This conceptualization, focusing in particular on mass action, is somewhat closer to intuitive ideas of mobilization than Tilly’s more abstract, formal definition.
for mobilization by elites... In short, people who are atomized readily become mobilized.”13 It is not so much, as McCarthy and Zald characterize the argument, that mass society theory ignores structure in favor of “shared grievances” and beliefs.14 Rather, mass society mischaracterizes the relationship between structure and action – positing social organization as countering instead of cultivating social action – and looks for structure in a different place than the resource mobilization theorists – amongst non-elites instead of elites. Thus, Kornhauser argues: “In short, the source of mass behavior cannot be located only in the structure of elites. It must also be found in the structure of non-elites, in a set of conditions close to the personal environment of the people who engage in mass behavior.”15

Mass society theory introduces major concepts that would later re-appear under the heading of political process theory. The parallels are particularly apparent in Smelser’s formulation. Structural conduciveness and structural strain together crudely approximate what under political process theory would be termed “the structure of political opportunities.”16 What Smelser terms “growth and spread of a generalized belief” captures what would later reappear as “cognitive liberation” or “framing.”17 This is McAdam’s quasi-constructivist intervention that structures must be understood by those that enact them, or as Smelser explained twenty years earlier: “before collective action can be taken to reconstitute the situation brought on by structural strain, this situation must be made meaningful to the potential actors. The meaning is supplied in a generalized belief, which identifies a source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to this source, and specifies certain responses to the strain as possible or appropriate [emphasis mine].”18 Finally, Smelser’s “mobilization of participants for action,” and one part of his notion of “social control,” approximates what would later be termed “indigenous organizational strength.”19 These social controls “determine how fast, how far, and in what directions the episode will develop,” just as later, McAdam’s indigenous communication networks “determine the pattern, speed, and extent of movement expansion.”20 Smelser’s formulation of mass society theory even foreshadows elements of the “contentious politics” revisions of McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly. Smelser emphasizes the study of “different combinations” of his six determinants, defines collective behavior broadly to include seemingly disparate events from wars to financial panics, and explicitly argues for the need to theorize dynamic processes rather than static features: “we must distinguish between the occurrence or existence of an event or situation, and the activation of this event or situation as a determinant.”21 In this way, it is possible to read the basic conceptual apparatus of mass society theory that describes mobilization into a crude approximation of political process theory.22

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13 Ibid., 33.
16 Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 15-6; McAdam, Political Process, 40-3.
17 Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 16; McAdam, Political Process, 48-51.
18 Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 16.
19 Ibid., 17; McAdam, Political Process, 43-8.
20 Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 17; McAdam, Political Process, 46.
21 Ibid., 19.
22 The chief issue that inhibits the mass society school from usefully explaining collective action is the proposed link between atomization and mobilization. According to Kornhauser “Social atomization engenders strong feelings of alienation and anxiety, and therefore the disposition to engage in extreme behavior to escape from these tensions” – the clear apolitical character of this statement is what has rightfully received criticism from subsequent schools (Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, 32). However, it should be noted that this link is treated in mass society theory as an assumption – as much an assumption, as resource deprivation theory’s assumption of invariant, universally available grievance. Smelser in particular treats the link in this way: “The defining characteristics of collective behavior are not psychological.
Resource Mobilization: Mobilization Departs

Critique: Inverting Mass Society Theory

As a critique of the apolitical character of mass society’s link from atomization to mobilization, John McCarthy, Mayer Zald, and other sociologists in the 1970s put forward a pseudo-economic alternative under the heading “resource mobilization,” which in many ways completely inverted the mass society model. Resource mobilization theory introduced the range of structural variables that mass society had ignored, while turning the acquisition and expression of grievance – the crux of mass society theory – into an assumption. As a consequence, “mobilization” itself dropped out of resource mobilization theory – that is, resource mobilization theory folded the action of committing to deliver resources into its static concepts.

The resource mobilization theorists critiqued mass society chiefly on two relevant points – one justified, and one less so. First mass society was apolitical – its chief animating premise flowed from psychology, not politics. Second, mass society was all agency and no structure – the presumption that “shared grievances” and “generalized beliefs” occur prior to the emergence of a social movement ruled out organizations from having any bearing on the process. 23

The pseudo-economic resource mobilization model can be thought of as a revision based on these critiques: the corrective for politicization and an apolitical model is resource mobilization’s rationalist framework, while the corrective for mass society’s over-emphasis on agency is an almost completely structural model. 24

In applying their corrective, the resource mobilization theorists paid very deliberate attention to careful concept formation. Therefore, it is all the more important that ‘mobilization’ does not appear in resource mobilization theory as a concept on its own, but rather is ‘folded in’ to other components of the framework. In McCarthy and Zald’s 1977 formulation of resource mobilization theory, each of the major concepts introduced is static and discrete, without an obvious processual variant – they’re all nouns, with no verbs. 25 For example, McCarthy and Zald define a social movement as a “set of opinions and beliefs which represent the preference for changing some

The definition we have presented does not, by itself, involve any assumptions that the persons involved in an episode are irrational . . . We shall rely, however, on many psychological assumptions as we attempt to build determinate explanations of collective behavior. We shall assume, for instance, that perceived structural strain at the social level excites feelings of anxiety, fantasy, hostility, etc. We shall assume that people in certain kinds of social situations are more receptive to suggestion than in others. We shall assume that individuals who hold more generalized beliefs respond more readily to leaders than those who do not” (Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 11).

23 McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” 1214; As we have observed, this second critique is not equally deserved across the entire school, as some mass society theorists (for example, Neil Smelser) did very explicitly include organizations as intervening variables.

24 Zald and Berger, “Social Movements in Organizations,” 829; Viewed in this way, the relationship between these two schools closely reflects the more self-consciously articulated debate in the civil war literature between “greed-” and grievance-” based theories of conflict onset.

25 This critique is similar to the one Goodwin and Jasper make of the subsequent political process school, in which they argue “The bias lurking beneath these problems is that ‘structural factors’ . . . are seen and emphasized more readily than others – and non-structural factors are often analyzed as though they were structural factors [emphasis mine]” (Goodwin and Jasper, Rethinking Social Movements, 4).
elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.” Preferences are tied to the social movement by definition – preference formation or change in preference cannot occur within a movement – rather, according to this definition, a change in preference implies a change in movement. Similarly, a social movement organization is a “formal organization that identifies its goals with preferences of a social movement.”

The resource mobilization framework does possess one opening for mobilization as an action – that is, holding the actor constant, a change in allocation of resources – to occur. It is the possibility for actors (in practice, elites) to change their classification in the framework, from adherents to constituents of a movement. McCarthy and Zald state that “One primary task of resource mobilization is to convert adherents into constituents” – this is mobilization, and in these studies typically refers to the conversion of elite conscious adherents who hold larger resource pools, but do not stand to benefit directly from achievement of the social goal.

However, in practice, resource mobilization theory typically neither explains, nor uses as explanation, the conversion of adherents into constituents – rather, it takes as its independent variable a pre-existing constellation of adherents, constituents, and their resources and uses that constellation to explain social movement outcomes. For example, in their examination of social movements within organizations, Zald and Berger write that “tactical choices are dependent upon prior relationships between partisans and authorities, the degree of consensus on goals between partisans and authorities, the amount of trust, and the relevant resources that partisans control [emphasis mine].” Mobilization is washed out of the analysis – this is born out in McCarthy and Zald’s 1977 article where they outline preliminary hypotheses. As illustrated in Table 1 (see appendix), for almost all of McCarthy and Zald’s hypotheses, the actual process mobilization – here the conversion of adherents – is either located prior to, after, or is orthogonal to the inquiry.

### Political Process: Mobilization Returns

The political process school levies three chief critiques on its predecessor: first, the resource mobilization model underspecifies the “resources” concept; second, the assumption that discontent is constant is unreasonable. The third critique develops the concept of mobilization: the resource mobilization model overemphasizes and underemphasizes the roles of elites and mass bases, respectively. According to political process theorists, elites are more conservative, and mass bases

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26 McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” 1218-19; Or more simply, “the expression of a preference for change among members of a society;” this variant does represent a slightly more processual version of the definition (Zald and Berger, “Social Movements in Organizations, 828). However, even here, “social movements differ in the breadth of support within the society (people who believe in the goals of the movement, contributors of time and money, activists and/or cadre)” but not in their ability to elicit support (ibid.).


28 An adherent is an individual or organization who believes in the goals of the movement; a constituent is one that provides it with resources (Ibid., 1221).

29 Ibid., 1222.

30 Zald and Berger, “Social Movements in Organizations,” 829; In fact, Zald and Berger’s study is an excellent illustration of this point – their approach is to carefully classify organizations as corporate hierarchical, federated, or voluntary, then describe the distribution of authority within corporate hierarchical organizations, then draw a direct line between each arrangement and possible social movement outcomes – organizational coup, bureaucratic insurgency, or mass movement (Ibid., 832-55).

31 McAdam, Political Process, 34-5; That is, it poorly approximates reality, and is not useful enough as an instrumental assumption.
are less helpless, than resource mobilization theorists claim.\(^{32}\) In terms of the Tilly mobilization formula, political process theory for elites decreases the likelihood of resource delivery, and for masses increases the value of resources available.\(^{33}\)

McAdam in particular elucidates a strong theoretical logic by which we should lower expectations that elites will deliver resources in a social movement – i.e., that elites will mobilize. The basic idea is that elites should not be expected to contribute resources to causes that threaten the system in which they are elite. As McAdam explains: “In the face of the substantive and strategic threats posed by movements, it is unlikely that polity members would act aggressively to promote insurgent challenges. Rather, elite involvement would seem to occur only as a response to the threat posed by the generation of a mass-based social movement.”\(^{34}\) Thus, we should expect elites to mobilize in ways that preserve the status-quo.\(^{35}\)

McAdam also revises the resource mobilization assumption that masses lack (1) the organizational resources and (2) the political resources to generate and sustain social insurgency. Specifically, resource mobilization theory does not account for a political resource – negative inducements (i.e. strikes, disruptive tactics), which are always available – and an organizational resource – indigenous social networks, which vary.\(^{36}\)

Furthermore, by foregoing the assumption that discontent is constant, McAdam also adjusts the ‘delivery’ side of the equation for masses. His argument is that the assumption is not useful because, even if objective conditions are held constant, understandings of those conditions may vary or change.\(^{37}\) This move picks up an important piece of mass society theory that resource mobilization theory dropped: not only that masses should be examined as the chief objects of mobilization in social movements, but that such mass mobilization depends crucially on how intervening actors mediate understandings of structure; in Smelser’s words, collective action “reconstitutes” structure; that a situation of structural strain “must be made meaningful to the potential actors. The meaning is supplied in a generalized belief, which identifies a source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to this source, and specifies certain response to the strain as possible or appropriate.”\(^{38}\) McAdam acknowledges the influence of mass society theory in his choice of psychological language to describe the concept – “cognitive liberation” – although in the second major formulation of political process theory, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald usefully bring the concept in line with a more

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 35
\(^{33}\) This can be thought of as walking back the resource mobilization conceptualization a few steps towards the mass society emphasis on non-elites.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 26; In fact, McAdam develops this critique into an full-fledged argument, stating that elites are more likely to mobilize for status-quo-reinforcing causes than socially disruptive ones: “insofar as these are elite-generated reform efforts, they pose no threat to the established structure of polity membership . . . the more enlightened members of the elite are likely to recognize that such efforts function ultimately to strengthen, rather than challenge, the status quo . . . top-down reform efforts may be seen by members as necessary societal tinkering to prevent major political disruption” (McAdam, Political Process, 25-6).
\(^{35}\) In McAdam’s formulation, this type of counter-mobilizing logic of containment resembles state-mobilized cases that seek to moderate more radical members of the state-supported movement: “member response typically consist of a two-pronged strategy that combines attempts to contain the more threatening aspects of the emerging conflict in a fashion consistent with the members’ own political interests.” (Ibid., 26).
\(^{36}\) McAdam, Political Process, 30; Piven and Cloward, Poor People’s Movements, 1979.
\(^{37}\) McAdam, Political Process, 34.
\(^{38}\) Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior, 16.
sociological ontology by terming it “cultural framing.”\textsuperscript{39} The bottom line for the development of mobilization under political process is that this model conceives of masses as more available for mobilization than the resource mobilization perspective, on both the resources and the delivery side of the mobilization definition.

\textit{How Mobilization Functions in the Theory}

Political process theory breaks contention into three components. They orient around the concept of mobilization as follows: the structure of political opportunities determines when, how much, and what kinds of mobilization are possible.\textsuperscript{40} Indigenous organizational strength describes the ‘resources’ piece of the mobilization formula; and cognitive liberation or cultural framing determines the ‘likelihood of delivery’ piece of the mobilization formula. The parsimony of this three-part schema is both an advantage of and limitation on the model.\textsuperscript{41}

The ‘indigenous organizational strength’ component of political process theory represents the most direct carry-over from previous resource mobilization scholars, though here organizational strength is conceptualized mainly as a characteristic of social structures amongst rank-and-file, while in the resource mobilization school organizational strength tended to effectively mean connection to elite conscience adherents.\textsuperscript{42} McAdam, citing Oberschall, identifies this component as marking the introduction of mobilization into the political process model: “Oberschall, for instance, has proposed a theory of mobilization in which he assigns paramount importance to the degree of organization in the minority community.”\textsuperscript{43} Indigenous organizational strength, as a variable, includes four types of resources – the most important is members, which are actual human capital and represent resources available for mobilization. McAdam notes that “If there is anything approximating a consistent finding in the empirical literature, it is that movement participants are recruited along established lines of interaction.”\textsuperscript{44}

The political process model also splits mobilization temporally, between movement initiation and movement continuation. Retaining insights from the resource mobilization school, McAdam argues

\textsuperscript{39} McAdam et. al., \textit{Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements}.

\textsuperscript{40} In the PPT schema, the structure of political opportunities, over the long term, “reduces the power discrepancy between insurgent groups [challengers] and their opponents [members]” thereby (1) “[producing] a net increase in the political leverage exercised by insurgent groups”, while (2) “raising significantly the costs of repressing insurgent action” (McAdam, \textit{Political Process}, 43). An important and unstated assumption to note here is that improved bargaining position will motivate challengers to pursue ends outside normal channels, instead of motivating them to simply leverage that position via existing institutionalized channels – a possible pathway towards state-supported mobilization. Goodwin and Jasper identify this ‘opening of political opportunity structures’ as overwhelmingly the chief causal variable in the political process framework, and criticize it as such – in my reading, however, political opportunity operates instead as a necessary \textit{but not sufficient} condition that must be met prior to the two other large machines for the theory, organizations and framing, which also more directly theorize mobilization.

\textsuperscript{41} McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly note the drawbacks of this parsimony when they argue against giving framing “a distinct ‘box’ or variable in the onset of contentious politics” – they have an epistemological quarrel with the strict delineations imposed by the political process framework (McAdam et. al., \textit{Dynamics of Contention}, 48).

\textsuperscript{42} Tarrow and Tollefson, \textit{Power in Movement}, 123-4, 131-4; Zhao, “Ecologies of Social Movements,” 1521.

\textsuperscript{43} McAdam, \textit{Political Process}, 44.

\textsuperscript{44} McAdam, \textit{Political Process}, 44; also Zhao, “Ecologies of Social Movements,” 1494; The remaining three types of resources moderate access to or catalyze acquisition of members: solidarity incentives or “the myriad interpersonal rewards that provide the motive force for participation in these groups,” communication networks, and leaders (McAdam, \textit{Political Process}, 45-8.). However, this schema of organizational resources can be expanded creatively – for example, to encompass the physical ecologies of university campuses (Zhao, “Ecologies of Social Movements.”).
that the indigenous organization component of PPT is particularly important for movement continuation: “For the movement to survive, insurgents must be able to create a more enduring organizational structure to sustain insurgency . . . This transfer of power can only occur, however, if the resources needed to fuel the development of the movement’s formal organizational structure can be mobilized. Accordingly, insurgent groups must be able to exploit the initial successes of the movement to mobilize those resources needed to facilitate the development of the more permanent organizational structure.”

The chief dangers associated with enduring formal organization – oligarchization, co-optation, and dissolution of indigenous support – have to do with relocation of the base of mobilization. This insight develops what began as the critique of the resource mobilization school stating that elites should not be expected to support status-quo-threatening politics. The takeaway for the development of mobilization as a concept is that political process theory, like resource mobilization theory, recognizes that who is being mobilized affects both pieces of the mobilization formula.

Conceptualizing Process

The addition of cognitive liberation, or alternatively cultural framing, as a distinct component is what makes mobilization, where it was missing from the resource mobilization model, an explicit and processual component of the political process model. It is the concept that accounts for a change in state from non-delivery to delivery of pre-existing resources, which are endowed by structure – in other words, it is the closest that political process theory comes to explicitly theorizing agency. McAdam acknowledges this function, explaining that “these two factors [expanding political opportunities and indigenous organizations] remain necessary, but insufficient, causes of insurgency. Together they offer insurgents a certain objective “structural potential” for collective political action.”

Finally, in explaining the process by which ‘cognitive liberation' or cultural framing takes place, McAdam writes: “the significance of existent organizations for the process of movement emergence stems from the expectation that cognitive liberation is most likely to take place within established interpersonal networks.” This note foreshadows a major revision of the political process framework that would be formalized in the subsequent contentious politics model. The political process model locates cognitive liberation and cultural framing after the “objective” structural variables of expanding political opportunities and indigenous organization. However, this quote suggests that the these components are endogenous to one another, inviting us to consider cases where framings may occur prior to structural changes, or even, in cases of state-sponsored mobilization, in anticipation of structural change.

45 McAdam, Political Process, 54.
46 Ibid., 55-6.
47 Ibid., 48; While McAdam claims that neither predecessor school accommodated agency in this way, as we observed, some mass society theorists did in fact touch on this idea – nevertheless, political process theory provides the first distinct and explicit formalization.
48 Ibid., 51.
49 This quote also hints at the possibility of networks playing a role not just in communicating information, but in constituting actors by encouraging particular social understandings – a ‘thicker’ relational perspective that has been explored by a number of other scholars. For example, Zhao, in his work on the physical ecology of Beijing University in shaping social movements, notes that “the role of networks in movement mobilization is not just communication but solidarity” (Zhao, “Ecologies of Social Movements,” 1511).
In this way, the political process model resurrected a few key ideas from mass society theory, providing masses with resources to mobilize by bringing in indigenous organizational strength, while endowing masses with the ability to choose to deliver or retain those resources depending on how they understand cultural frames – this is how mobilization becomes an explicit and processual component of this model.

**Contentious Politics: Mobilization Stretches**

The contentious politics model, as articulated by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, is based on two major, interrelated critiques of the political process model: according to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, the political process framework captures static rather than dynamic relationships, and for this reason, fails to adequately explain mobilization as a full process.\(^50\) Thus, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly claim to target mobilization more directly and completely: “we focus on the mobilization process in general, leaving the question of the origins of contention to be specified as an empirical variant of the general process . . . mobilization occurs *throughout an episode of contention* [emphasis mine].\(^51\)

For McAdam Tarrow and Tilly, moving to a dynamic model of contentious politics essentially means transforming each of the major political process model components from a static object to a process over time (i.e., from a noun to a verb). Thus, political opportunities become the *attribution of* political opportunities, mobilizing structures become the *appropriation of* sites for mobilization, cultural frames become the *social construction of* political conflict, and collective action repertories become the *innovation of* new collective actions.\(^52\)

The primary consequence of these theoretical moves for empirical study is that they broaden the scope of actors, actions, and cases under each component of the framework. This means that the contentious politics approach does not necessarily more *directly* explain mobilization; rather, that it multiplies the number of ways in which each piece of the mobilization formula – resources and likelihood of delivery – can be studied. By considering the appropriation of organizational sites, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly introduce new pathways by which mobilization can be achieved.\(^53\)

Framing as a concept similarly broadens: “in contrast to the classical agenda . . . we do not see framing as a distinct ‘box’ or variable in the onset of contentious politics; for us, framing and interpretation go well beyond how a movement’s goals are strategically formed to a much broader set of interpretive processes”\(^54\). By making framing an iterative process, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly expand the number of parties involved and problematize the notion that it is, or can be, strategic.

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\(^{50}\) That political process theory fails to accommodate dynamic processes is also one of Goodwin and Jasper’s major critiques of the model – in their words, “Process theorists tend to wash the meaning and fluidity out of strategy, agency, and culture so that they will look more like structures” (Goodwin and Jasper, *Rethinking Social Movements*, 4).

\(^{51}\) McAdam et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 44-5; Next to this major critique, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly make a number of other critiques that, while they do not define the paradigm, do have important implications for how the framework is applied to cases of mobilization empirically – the political process model: (1) centers too narrowly on social movements rather than broader “episodes of contention,” (2) explains cases where organizational resources expand and increase, but falls short where organizations face a deficit of resources, and (3) focuses inordinately on origins of contention, at the cost of explaining later phases of contentious politics (Ibid. 42).

\(^{52}\) Ibid. 43-5.

\(^{53}\) For example, for the American civil rights movement, black church congregations as static institutions were conservative and unavailable as instruments of collective action, but became mobilizing structures through the mechanism of social appropriation (Ibid., 47-8).

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 48.
The set of actors involved at all stages is also expanded.\textsuperscript{55} In fact, all these expansions demand that we ask whether mobilization is still a useful concept, or whether in the contentious politics framework mobilization has become indistinguishable from political action.\textsuperscript{56} McAdam and Tarrow in a special issue of the journal \textit{Mobilization} assessing \textit{Dynamics of Contention} ten years after publication themselves began to gesture in the direction of having softened the paradigm too much.\textsuperscript{57} In short, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly’s broadening of mobilization threatens to approach conceptual stretching.

\textit{An Aside: Mobilization in a Network Context}

The development of mobilization as a concept and its treatment in the conversation between political process theory and the contentious politics model leaves us with a still-unsolved problem: how to understand mobilization as a process, as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly prescribe, but without stretching the concept as far as they do. Here, I would like to tentatively suggest network approaches as one potential candidate for solving this problem. Networks are not new – authors discussed here have frequently referred to indigenous network structure, claimed roots in the relational perspective, and cited studies that utilize network measures.\textsuperscript{58} Roger Gould’s work exemplifies a different approach – one that makes the ontological move of taking as its starting point the relation as unit-of-analysis. In his work on the Paris Commune, Gould is able to capture of the process of mobilization under the Commune using a multiple-network-based explanation in which, “Mobilization does not just depend on social ties – it also creates them.”\textsuperscript{59} The notion of mobilization as a tie-creating act, given that the tie is permanent enough to organize the delivery of resources, may be one approach to conceptualizing mobilization that maintains the processual aspect without losing the basic intuitive meaning of the concept. Gould suggests that such an approach could guide further work: “it should be possible to characterize any mobilization in terms of a mapping of formal organizational ties onto an indigenous network of informal ties.”\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{55} In their Montgomery bus boycott example, McAdam Tarrow and Tilly bring into the case presidential administrations, supreme courts, and party flanks (the Dixiecrats), as new actors that undergo mobilization (McAdam et. al., \textit{Dynamics of Contention}, 46-7). In a similar spirit, Goodwin and Jasper seek to expand the scope of inquiry for studies of social movements, arguably beyond the realm of open politics, to include “literary, musical, and other artistic movements . . . efforts such as the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, the contemporary ‘hip hop’ movement, or the steelband movement in Trinidad and Tobago” (Goodwin and Jasper, \textit{Rethinking Social Movements}, 10).

\textsuperscript{56} A similar critique can be made of the Goodwin and Jasper approach, which works off of similar premises (an attempt to break down strict specifications and static concepts), but goes so far as to be unable to offer an alternative model of their own: “Because we do not believe that an invariant model of social movements is possible, we do not pretend to offer another, ‘better’ model than those proposed by political process theorists, but rather a more expansive set of concepts and distinctions for the analysis of social movements.” (Goodwin and Jasper, \textit{Rethinking Social Movements}, 5). In fact, this may be a more useful way to consider both McAdam Tarrow and Tilly’s contentious politics framework, and Goodwin and Jasper’s contributions – as an expansion of, rather than full-fledged alternative to, the political process model.

\textsuperscript{57} McAdam and Tarrow do not point to conceptual stretching directly, but do more generally point to the contentious politics model attempting to accommodate and accomplish too much – a scaled-up version of the problem. They explain: “We had too little to say about too many episodes of contention, we too casually adduced too many mechanisms, we paid too little attention to their empirical demonstration, and (this never ceased to exercise our late senior partner), we gave too little attention to the connections between contentious politics and different forms of regime” (McAdam and Tarrow, “Dynamics of Contention Ten Years On,” 5).

\textsuperscript{58} McAdam, \textit{Political Process}, 46-8; McAdam et. al., \textit{Dynamics of Contention}, 22-4, 26.

\textsuperscript{59} Gould, “Multiple Networks,” 719.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 728.
Concluding Remarks

This memo has followed the development of mobilization as a concept through four bodies of social movement theory – mass society, resource mobilization, political process, and contentious politics – in a way that treats the evolution of this concept distinctly from questions of knowledge accumulation. Thus, regardless of what each school of thought has been able accomplish empirically, how these scholars have chosen to explain mobilization traces a back-and-forth wave-like pattern. Counter to its reputation, mass society theory provided some useful and formative contributions, opening an explicit space in its framework to accommodate mobilization and treating it as a dynamic process. In its attempt to correct the errors of mass society theory, the quasi-economic resource mobilization model dropped these key insights, instead folding mobilization into its classification of actors and their preferences. Political process theory revived the concept of mobilization by re-introducing, in a surprisingly congruent way, some of the more useful components from mass society theory. Specifically, political process theory accounted for the ‘resources’ side of mobilization by providing masses with organizations, while also theorizing the ‘delivery’ side by endowing those masses with the ability to make social choices based on how they understood cultural frames. The contentious politics framework put the still static political process model into motion, but in doing so potentially stretched the concept of mobilization to a degree past usefulness. In this way, the zigzagging pathway that this concept of mobilization has taken ends at a puzzle: how to conceptualize (and study) mobilization as a process, without losing correspondence with what the concept is meant to describe intuitively.
Bibliography

## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H#</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Relation to Mobilization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>As the amount of discretionary resources of mass and elite publics increases, the absolute and relative amount of resources available to the SMS [social movement sector] increases (p. 1224)</td>
<td>Pre-mobilization: These hypotheses ask about processes that occur prior to mobilization – they seek to explain characteristics (resources available, amount of advertising, goals and strategies) that are themselves independent variables for mobilization</td>
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<td>4a</td>
<td>The more dependent a SMO [social movement organization] is upon isolated constituencies, the greater the share of its resources which will be allocated to advertising (p. 1230)</td>
<td>Post-mobilization: These hypotheses ask about process that occur after mobilization has completed – they seek to explain characteristics (SMO dependence, SMO tension and conflict, size and professionalism of staff, the presence of transitory teams) that are formed once mobilization has already occurred</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>The more competitive an SMI [social movement industry] (a function of the number and size of the existing SMOs), the more likely it is that the new SMOs will offer narrow goals and strategies (p. 1234)</td>
<td>Orthogonal to mobilization: These hypotheses ask about processes that have no direct bearing on mobilization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The more a SMO is dependent upon isolated constituents the less stable will be the flow of resources to the SMO (p. 1228)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>A SMO which attempts to link both conscience and beneficiary constituents to the organization through federated chapter structures, and hence solidarity incentives, is likely to have high levels of tension and conflict (p. 1230)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The larger the income flow to a SMO the more likely that a cadre and staff are professional and the larger are these groups (p. 1234)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>The more a SMO is made up of workers with discretionary time a their disposal, the more readily it can develop transitory teams (p. 1236)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Regardless of the resources available to potential beneficiary adherents, the larger the amount of resources available to conscious adherents, the more likely is the development of SMOs and SMIs that respond to preferences for change (p. 1225)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Older, established SMOs are more likely than newer SMOs to persist throughout the cycle of SMI growth and decline (p. 1233)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>The larger the SMS and the larger the specific SMIs, the more likely it is that SM careers will develop (p. 1235)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>The more an SMO is funded by isolated constituents, the more likely that beneficiary constituent workers are recruited for strategic purposes rather than organizational work (p. 1235)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The greater the absolute amount of resources available to the SMS, the greater the likelihood that new SMIs and SMOs will develop to compete for those resources (p. 1225)</td>
<td>Explains mobilization: Only this hypotheses, number two, explicitly posits mobilization as its dependent variable – in this case, it is the SMOs that are being mobilized, as they commit (deliver) time and effort (resources) to the acquisition of new, further resources</td>
</tr>
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Table 1: This table pulls hypotheses from McCarthy and Zald, 1977 and classifies them according to their relationship with the concept of mobilization. That only one hypothesis of these eleven, number two, directly seeks to explain mobilization is evidence that resource mobilization theory in practice rarely seeks to explain the actual process of mobilization – the action of committing resources.